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Amendments to the Claims

1. (currently amended) A method for collecting reports of at least one parameter comprising the following steps:

all in a central computer system:

automatically receiving from any of a plurality of arbitrary senders, via a publicly accessible transmission channel, an electronic representation of an image of any of a plurality of physical forms, having at least two different layouts, said representation being generated by a standard, conventional image-conversion device, the form having a plurality of data fields, each corresponding to an indicator, which may be alphanumeric, of at least a partial value of at least one of the parameters;

pre-storing an electronic representation of a template for each of the plurality of physical forms;

automatically and uniquely identifying the physical form from the electronic representation of its received image;

automatically identifying the location of the data fields in the received representation of the image of the form by automatically comparing the received electronic representation of the image of the physical form with at least one of the pre-stored electronic representations of ~~at least one~~ the plurality of templates;

automatically extracting from the identified data fields the at least partial values of the corresponding parameters; and

automatically storing the extracted values in a predetermined format in a memory for subsequent processing as well as the representation of the received physical form as it was received.

2. (original) A method as in claim 1, in which the electronic representation of the image of the physical form is generated using a conventional facsimile machine, whereby the transmission channel is a standard telephone line.

3. (original) A method as in claim 2, further including the step of transferring the stored extracted values to an external recipient via a network, all processing of the physical form after transmission by the sender up to and including transfer to the external recipient via the network thereby taking place automatically.

4. (original) A method as in claim 1, in which each data field indicates a quantifiable or itemizable value of a corresponding one of the parameters, further including the additional step of storing the received electronic representation of the image of the physical form in the memory, whereby non-quantifiable and non-itemizable entries by the user onto the physical form are made available for subsequent review.

5. (original) A method as in claim 1, further including the step of storing recipient-entered annotations in the memory along with the stored extracted values of the respective received form.

6. (original) A method as in claim 1, further comprising:

associating at least two different physical forms with different senders; and

automatically determining the identity of each sender based on the received image of the physical form.

7. (currently amended) A method as in claim 6, further comprising:

~~storing an electronic representation of a template of each included physical form; and~~

automatically identifying the received forms by performing a best-fit comparison of each received electronic representation of the image of one of the physical forms with the pre-stored electronic representations of the templates.

8. (original) A method as in claim 1, in which the step of automatically identifying the location of the data fields comprises the following sub-steps:

storing an electronic representation of a template of each of a plurality of physical forms;

automatically identifying each received form by performing a best-fit comparison of each received electronic representation of the image of the corresponding physical form with the stored electronic representations of the templates;

automatically registering the received electronic representation of the received physical form image with the best-fit electronic template representation; and

matching the data fields in the received electronic representation of the received physical form image with corresponding data fields in the best-fit electronic template representation.

9. (original) A method as in claim 1, in which:

the electronic representation of the image of the physical form is generated using a conventional facsimile machine;

the transmission channel is a standard telephone line;

at least one of the parameters is time; and

the physical form is a time sheet.

10. (previously presented) A method for collecting reports of at least one parameter comprising the following steps:

all in a central computer system:

automatically receiving from any of a plurality of arbitrary senders, via a publicly accessible transmission channel, an electronic representation of an image of a physical form, the form having a plurality of data fields, each corresponding to an indicator, which may be alphanumeric, of at least a partial value of at least one of the parameters;

automatically and uniquely identifying the physical form from the electronic representation of its received image;

automatically identifying the location of the data fields in the received representation of the image of the form by comparing the received electronic representation of the image of the physical form with at least one pre-stored electronic representation of at least one template;

automatically extracting from the identified data fields the at least partial values of the corresponding parameters; and

automatically storing the extracted values in a predetermined format in a memory for subsequent processing as well as the representation of the received physical form as it was received.; and

transferring the stored extracted values to an external recipient via a network, all processing of the physical form after transmission by the sender up to and including transfer to the external recipient via the network thereby taking place automatically;

in which:

the electronic representation of the image of the physical form is generated using a standard, conventional facsimile machine, whereby the transmission channel is a standard telephone line and the central computer system is separate from the facsimile machine other than through its connection via the transmission channel;

each data field indicates a quantifiable or itemizable value of a corresponding one of the parameters, further including the additional step of storing the received electronic representation of the image of the physical form in the memory, whereby non-quantifiable and non-itemizable entries by the user onto the physical form are made available for subsequent review;

the step of automatically identifying the location of the data fields comprises the following sub-steps:

storing an electronic representation of a template of each of a plurality of physical forms;

automatically identifying each received form by performing a best-fit comparison of each received electronic representation of the image of the corresponding physical form with the stored electronic representations of the templates;

automatically registering the received electronic representation of the received physical form image with the best-fit electronic template representation; and

matching the data fields in the received electronic representation of the received physical form image with corresponding data fields in the best-fit electronic template representation.

11. (currently amended) A system for collecting reports of at least one parameter comprising:

a central server that includes:

I/O means for automatically receiving from any of a plurality of arbitrary senders, via a publicly accessible transmission channel, an electronic representation of an image of any of a plurality of physical forms, having at least two different layouts said representation being generated by a standard, conventional image-conversion device, the form having a plurality of data fields, each corresponding to an indicator, which may be alphanumeric, of at least a partial value of at least one of the parameters;

storage for an electronic representation of a template for each of the plurality of physical forms;

form processing means:

for automatically and uniquely identifying the physical form from the electronic representation of its received image;

for automatically identifying the location of the data fields in the received representation of the image of the form by automatically comparing the received electronic representation of the image of the physical form with at least one of the pre-stored electronic representations of ~~at least one~~the plurality of templates;

for automatically extracting from the identified data fields the at least partial values of the corresponding parameters; and

for automatically storing the extracted values in a predetermined format in a memory for subsequent processing as well as the representation of the received physical form as it was received.

12. (previously presented) A system as in claim 11, further comprising:
a facsimile machine forming means for converting the physical form into the electronic representation and for sending the electronic representation of the image of the physical form to the central server,
in which:
the form is generated using a conventional facsimile machine; and
the transmission channel is a standard telephone line.

13. (original) A system as in claim 11, in which the form processing means includes annotation means for receiving and storing recipient-entered annotations in the memory along with the stored extracted values of the respective received form.